

# MORGAN HILL TIMES

## Face to face with school cuts

Monday, May 23, 2011

By Lindsay Weaver ([lweaver@morganhilltimes.com](mailto:lweaver@morganhilltimes.com))

The budget woes in Sacramento have trickled down to Morgan Hill many times before, but this budget has put Elizabeth Tran's younger sister in a funk.

"When I told my sister there might not be sports, she was really bummed," said Tran, 13, an eighth-grade high jumper at Martin Murphy Middle School. The elimination of after-school sports at Morgan Hill Unified's two middle schools is just a fraction of what has not been reduced, though it is still up for consideration.

Last week, giving MHUSD insight as to what a final 2011-12 budget will look like, was the release of Gov. Jerry Brown's May budget revise that detailed a \$6.6 billion jump in tax revenue and a plan that still bets on the state legislature passing Brown's proposed tax extensions. Funding could stay at the 2010-11 levels instead of taking another dip.

With several unknowns remaining in the complicated domain of education funding, MHUSD is anticipating a cut of \$350 per student per year, which is already factored into the district's current budget scenario that took a \$1.26 million reduction last week. Yet, because of lost enrollment (about \$200,000 for 143 students), increased costs for special education and other considerations before a late June deadline, the school district is looking at an additional \$580,000 to cut in 2011-12.

For every dollar taken away from the district's budget, someone is affected - like Annalicia Anaya, an athlete at Martin Murphy Middle School who pleaded with the school board not to eliminate after-school sports. "They helped me grow as a student. Now I want to go to college," she said. Or, Maria Gonzales, a food service employee of 13 years who is losing an hour of work a day. Or, Dennis Browne, the principal of the Community Adult School, who has proposed reducing his own salary by 40 percent to save programs for adult education.

Budget cuts, no matter how serious or slight, are as tangible as the people they trouble.

### Life after being a teen, before earning a diploma

As state funding has dwindled in the Great Recession so have the programs beyond putting children into classrooms and teachers in front of them - even if it's one teacher in front of 30 kindergartners.

Since 2009, the budget for the Community Adult School has been reduced by 40 percent - that's a \$365,000 budget to serve about 1,000 students and support 22 mostly part-time employees.

"(Principal Dennis Browne) is way concerned with the teachers and wants to protect as much of the school as possible," said Carma Dreyfus, a teacher at the Community Adult School.

Browne proposed last month to knock his own salary by 40 percent to save some classes for adult education. "I'm sure he's going to give up a lot more than he should. He's a very good principal, who has a heart for the school," Dreyfus said.

Dreyfus splits her time between the adult school, located behind Britton Middle School, and Central Continuation High School just across Monterey Road. Every week since 2006, Dreyfus has taught the GED preparatory course and English Second Language classes on Monday and Wednesday nights. During the day she also serves as a counselor at Central.

The tenor at the adult school isn't exactly rosy. "Everybody is afraid. A lot of people who depend on these jobs, they need the money," she said. "(Public education) is supposed to be about helping everybody, not just the smartest and the brightest. (Our students) get lost in the shuffle. These are the people who end up at adult school. It's a giant population who need help," Dreyfus said.



Food service workers Rosalia Martinez, left, and Maria Murillo help a rush of students get what they need during brunch at Sobrato High School.  
Photo by: Lora Schraft



Students celebrate during the 2007 Britton Middle School promotion ceremony, which will be canceled in 2012.



Browne, who will draw up a final budget before submitting it to the district - which approved a \$100,000 budget cut May 10 - has proposed cutting an administrative position (one of two) in the office affecting how many hours a day the adult school can stay open. Dreyfus said it's the state and federal government she's disappointed in. They "don't value education as much as they say they do. Their actions don't match their words," she said.

While Dreyfus' job was saved from the round of layoffs, 17 elementary teaching jobs have been eliminated and at least eight temporary teachers will not return to MHUSD this fall to balance the class size increases.

Earlier in her career Dreyfus said she was compelled to write her legislators at the local, state and federal level and make her concerns heard, but now she believes it's a waste of time.

"I'm very discouraged and disgruntled. I feel like nobody is listening to me anyway," Dreyfus said. "They're going to do what they want to, despite what the constituency wants."

### **'We're going to be cramped'**

Every day breakfast and lunch for the district's eight elementary schools and two junior high schools are prepared in the kitchen at Ann Sobrato High. Four-hundred more lunches for Sobrato - from daily specials to burgers to burritos - are prepared by the 10 women of the Sobrato kitchen. They are the women keeping many schoolchildren well-fed.

Despite the kitchen's significance, no department is safe from the budget pinch; the food service budget is being cut by \$15,000. To three women it's five hours removed from their paycheck each week.

"That's going to be about \$250 a month out of our check and it will affect me as far as medical insurance. The out-of-pocket is going to be more," said Sobrato kitchen employee Maria Gonzales, a 13-year employee of MHUSD.

Beyond the blow to their stipends, the women say their day is already overloaded preparing 2,000 lunches a day. "For the frozen food, we still have to bake it and serve it. That takes a lot of time," Gonzales said. The three affected employees will work six hours a day, effective July 1.

To aid the staff, the district has included three more employees to the shuffle at 8:30 a.m. to add more hands and to offset the gap in work production that occurs while the lead employees prepare and receive deliveries first thing in the morning.

"When staff arrives at 7:30 a.m. two additional employees are also arriving and everything will be ready to go and they can start production immediately," according to what Bonnie Tognazzini and the business office shared with cafeteria employees who belong to MHUSD's Service Employees International Union chapter.

Logic is lacking in the addition of employees in the morning, Gonzales said. "We're going to be cramped with everything," she said.

The kitchen staff says they weren't informed of the proposed changes until the day they were presented to the school board April 5 and approved that night 7-0.

"They just said this is the way it is. We took it to the union and I'm trying, I'm hoping we get (the hours back). This is really going to affect us," Gonzales said. She works a second job and said since being reduced from eight hours (for 12 years) to seven and now to six hours a day, she has taken her family off her insurance.

Outside of the Sobrato kitchen, the SEIU workforce was reduced by six other positions. This time, the positions were unfilled and the funding was eliminated so no employees were laid off. In that list are: a grant-funded American history grant coordinator, administrative secretary at the Adult School, a senior clerk at the Adult School, a para-educator in special education (because the student who needed the one-on-one help has left the school district), a grant-funded job developer and a transportation assistant. Those positions were eliminated April 5 and will go into effect July 1.

### **Middle school commiseration**

Middle-school students don't often shy from postulating, especially when it's going to cut into something they care about. Near the few rows of bleachers at Los Paseos Park one afternoon in May where Martin Murphy Middle School's track team practices after school, a throng of teens had a lot to say about the district considering the elimination of their coaches' stipends and their graduation ceremony.

"Kids should be able to stay involved with sports because that's the way they stay active and stay involved and stay in shape," said Maddie Miller, 14, also Martin Murphy's student body president.

"This takes away the opportunity to get involved in the school. They shouldn't do it," she said.

Miller said just days before she was getting fitted for her graduation cap and gown when she first learned of the elimination of eighth-grade promotion ceremonies, which was approved by the school board May 10.

"My ASB teacher said, 'We won't have to do this next year,' she told me. It's pretty sad," Miller said.

Nearby, overhearing Miller's comment, seventh-grader Shannon Hoyle's jaw hit the grass.

"That's so unfair," she said quietly.

Miller said not walking at graduation is the usual punishment for students who didn't make the grade or have behavior issues. She didn't understand why every student would face that punishment; "You work this hard so you can be recognized for your hard work. And now the hard work won't be recognized in front of your peers," Miller said.

At the school board of trustee's meeting at 6 p.m. today they will discuss the budget recommendations still on the table: extra-curricular/duty stipends (\$500,000), reduction of professional dues (\$10,000), reduction of administrator's cell phones (\$22,500), and negotiating district-wide class size increase to 29 students to one teacher.

Martin Murphy father and track/cross country coach Jim Carrillo said he understood the district is facing tough decisions, but he didn't know of anyone who coach middle school for the money. Carrillo coaches his two daughters, who attend Murphy, along with a team of mothers, fathers and dedicated community members.

"It's low enough to the point where what coaches get paid is not why they do it," Carrillo said. His wife coaches the Murphy cheerleading team. "Compensation is not a decision-maker. It covers gas. But for the amount of time ... sometimes I put hours into planning for the day ... if you look at the hourly rate, it's a few pennies."

Hundreds of stipends for extra duty jobs (such as GATE coordinator or band teacher) and coaching (including assistants) make up the \$500,000 MHUSD spends each year to keep extra-curricular programs and athletics afloat. The board will discuss the stipend budget tonight and address the possibility of eliminating or reducing middle school stipends, which was effectively saved at the last round of budget reductions May 10. The district has noted that nothing recommended by the budget committee (comprised of union representatives) is off the table.

---

**Lindsay Weaver**

Lindsay Weaver is a reporter for South Valley Newspapers. She covers education, water issues and Santa Clara County. Weaver can be reached at [lweaver@morganhilltimes.com](mailto:lweaver@morganhilltimes.com).